

Message Text

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SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 ACDA-07 AID-05 EB-08 TRSE-00
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8385
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
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USMISSION USUN NY
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 TEL AVIV 7182

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: FR, IS
SUBJECT: FRENCH-ISRAELI RELATIONS

REF: A. TEL AVIV 1469
B. PARIS 8232
C. TEL AVIV 2315

SUMMARY: THERE HAVE BEEN RECENT INDICATIONS THAT BOTH
PARIS AND JERUSALEM WOULD LIKE TO IMPROVE RELATIONS
BETWEEN ISRAEL AND FRANCE--RELATIONS WHICH HAVE REMAINED
STRAINED IN RECENT YEARS AND WHICH WERE PARTICULARLY
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EXACERBATED BY THE ABU-DAOUD AFFAIR IN JANUARY. THIS
SEEMS TO BE PART OF A PERIODIC EXERCISE AND WHILE WE
CAN EXPECT A CHANGE IN STYLE, IT IS UNLIKELY THAT
THERE WILL BE ANY CHANGE IN THE SUBSTANCE OF THE
RELATIONSHIP SO LONG AS ISRAEL CONTINUES TO BELIEVE
THAT FRANCE PLACES ITS ARAB INTERESTS ABOVE A MORE
BALANCED "MORAL" POSITION IN THE MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT.

ISRAEL IS PARTICULARLY CONCERNED THAT OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES NOT YIELD TO FRANCE THE ROLE OF SPOKESMAN FOR A COMMON EUROPEAN INTEREST IN THE MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT. END SUMMARY

1. DURING A NEW YEAR'S INTERVIEW BROADCAST OVER IDF RADIO ON SEPTEMBER 6, PRIME MINISTER BEGIN INDICATED THAT HE WOULD LIKE TO SEE AN IMPROVEMENT IN RELATIONS BETWEEN ISRAEL AND FRANCE: "WE WOULD LIKE TO SEE A CHANGE FOR THE BETTER. WE HAVE FRIENDS WITHIN THE (FRENCH) GOVERNMENT, IN PARLIAMENT AND VIRTUALLY THE ENTIRE FRENCH PUBLIC SUPPORTS THE STATE OF ISRAEL; THEREFORE, AN EFFORT MUST BE MADE TO BRING ABOUT A RENEWAL OF THE FRIENDSHIP AND, IF POSSIBLE, A RESUMPTION OF THE ALLIANCE." THE PRIME MINISTER EXPRESSED A WILLINGNESS TO VISIT FRANCE IF EXTENDED AN OFFICIAL INVITATION, BUT ADDED THE CAVEAT THAT "THIS WOULD DEPEND ON THE REPLY OF THE OTHER SIDE." THIS POSITION WAS REITERATED BY BEGIN IN AN INTERVIEW WITH FRANCE-SOIR PUBLISHED THE FOLLOWING DAY: "I WOULD BE VERY HAPPY TO VISIT YOUR COUNTRY, PARTICULARLY IF I COULD CONTRIBUTE TO RENEWING OUR LINKS OF FRIENDSHIP," BUT AGAIN HE QUALIFIED HIS STATEMENT BY ADDING: "A CERTAIN NUMBER OF MEASURES MUST BE TAKEN BEFOREHAND TO ARRANGE THIS VISIT." THESE STATEMENTS REFLECT STATEMENTS MADE CONFIDENTIAL

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IN MARCH BY FRENCH FOREIGN MINISTER DE GUIRINGUAD DURING A VISIT TO ISRAEL THAT HE WOULD LIKE TO SEE A NEW PAGE IN THE RELATIONSHIP (SEE TEL AVIV 2315). IN VIEW OF THIS CURRENT INTEREST WE HAVE DISCUSSED THE STATE OF FRENCH-ISRAELI RELATIONS WITH FRENCH EMBASSY (DCM BUTIN) AND MFA (DESK OFFICER PADON) OFFICERS.

2. THE ISRAELIS, ACCORDING TO PADON, WOULD BE RECEPTIVE TO FRENCH GESTURES IF CONVINCED THOSE GESTURES ARE BACKED BY SINCERITY AND SENSITIVITY TOWARD ISRAEL. ISRAEL IS AWARE THAT FRENCH ACTIONS AND ATTITUDES HAVE BEEN BASED UPON "REALISTIC" FRENCH CONSIDERATIONS INVOLVING POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC INFLUENCE, AND NOT UPON MORAL ISSUES OR JUDGEMENTS OF RIGHT AND WRONG. IN THE MONTHS AHEAD, IT IS EXPECTED THAT FRENCH POLICY WILL BE BASED ON AN EVALUATION OF THE DIVIDENDS ACCRUING FROM A POLICY OF COURTSHIP OF THE ARABS WEIGHED AGAINST THE POTENTIAL OF A MORE BALANCED APPROACH.

3. FROM THE ISRAELI PERSPECTIVE, FRANCE HAS CON-

TINUED ITS PRO-ARAB COURSE FOR SEVERAL REASONS:

(A) GEOGRAPHIC. FRANCE CONSIDERS ITSELF IN A
UNIQUE POSITION TO BUILD A SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH
THE ARAB MEDITERRANEAN, BASED ON ITS HISTORIC AND
CULTURAL TIES IN THE MAHGREB AND THE LEVANT; THROUGH
THIS POSITION IT SEEKS TO EXERCISE AND REINFORCE ITS
POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC LEVERAGE IN THE MIDDLE EAST.
THE PRESENT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FRANCE AND THE
MEDITERRANEAN LARGELY RESULTED FROM THE EVIAN
AGREEMENT OF 1962, WHICH ENDED THE ALGERIAN REVOLUTION,
AND THE GROWING IMPORTANCE OF OIL WHICH HAD LED DEGAULLE
TO REVERSE FRENCH POLICY FROM ALLIANCE WITH ISRAEL
TO COURTSHIP OF THE ARABS, A POLICY FURTHER REINFORCED
BY THE OIL EMBARGO FOLLOWING THE YOM KIPPUR WAR.
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(B) ECONOMIC. FRANCE, DUE TO THE WEAKNESS OF ITS ECONOMY, CANNOT AFFORD A MORE BALANCED APPROACH. FRANCE IS NOT AN ECONOMIC POWER AND COULD NOT WITHSTAND A BOYCOTT OR EMBARGO. IN ADDITION, FRANCE HAS AN EXTENSIVE BUT POTENTIALLY VULNERABLE INFRASTRUCTURE OF DEFENSE AND INTELLIGENCE TIES, COMMERCIAL CONTRACTS, AND INVESTMENTS IN NORTH AFRICA AND THE MOSLEM SAHEL.

(C) COMMERCIAL. THE ARAB MARKET, IN TERMS OF RESOURCES, IS POTENTIALLY MUCH MORE LUCRATIVE THAN ISRAEL. TO PARAPHRASE DEGAULLE: "FRANCE HAS NO FRIENDS AND ALLIES, FRANCE HAS ONLY ECONOMIC INTERESTS." NEVERTHELESS, THE FRENCH NOW REGRET PASSING UP A CONFIDENTIAL

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SIZEABLE ISRAELI MARKET WHICH HAS A NATURAL PREFERENCE FOR FRENCH PRODUCTS AND CONDUCTS BUSINESS IN A RELIABLE MANNER.

4. IN CONSIDERATION OF THE ABOVE FACTORS, IT APPEARS FROM HERE THAT FRANCE IS UNLIKELY TO DEVIATE FROM ITS PRESENT GENERAL POLICY. ISRAELI HOPES, HOWEVER, THAT FRANCE MAY TRY FOR LIMITED IMPROVEMENT IN RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL IF THIS CAN BE DONE WITHOUT AFFECTING ITS AMBITIONS IN THE ARAB WORLD. THE FRENCH, ISRAELIS BELIEVE, REALIZED THAT WITH THE FAILURE OF DE GUIRINGAUD'S PEACE EFFORT IN LEBANON THAT FRANCE, ALMOST LIKE THE USSR, HAD OUSTED ITSELF FROM A MAJOR ROLE DUE TO A ONE-SIDED POLICY WHICH PRECLUDED ANY INFLUENCE WITH THE ISRAELIS. THE ISRAELIS ARE HOPEFUL THAT GISCARD IS BEGINNING TO REALIZE THAT THE ONE-SIDED POLICY HAS NOT BEEN SUCCESSFUL; THAT THE FRENCH POSITION VIS-A-VIS ITS EUROPEAN PARTNERS MAY BE STRENGTHENED BY REVERTING TO A MORE NORMAL RELATIONSHIP WITH ISRAEL. ISRAEL BELIEVES THAT OF ALL THE WESTERN NATIONS, FRANCE HAS DONE THE MOST TO PLEASE THE ARABS IN THE BELIEF THAT IT WOULD GET PREFERENTIAL AID ON OIL SUPPLIES, ORDERS FOR FRENCH PRODUCTS, AND OTHER ECONOMIC ADVANTAGES. NOW, AFTER TEN YEARS, THE FRENCH ARE DISAPPOINTED THAT THEIR HOPES HAVEN'T BEEN ENTIRELY MET. (THIS SEEMS TO REFLECT THE GENERAL ISRAELI VIEW OF NEGOTIATING WITH THE ARABS.)

5. ANOTHER FACTOR IN FRANCE'S DESIRE TO NORMALIZE RELATIONS, IN ADDITION TO GAINING INFLUENCE AND IMPROVING MARKETS, MAY BE GISCARD'S DESIRE TO WOO JEWISH AND OTHER TRADITIONALLY ANTI-ARAB RIGHT WING VOTERS IN WHAT IS EXPECTED TO BE A HOTLY CONTENTED

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GENERAL ELECTION NEXT MARCH. THE CONSENSUS IN ISRAELI IS THAT FRANCE WILL ASSUAGE THE ISRAELIS AND ATTEMPT A POLICY OF NORMALIZATION AND DAMAGE LIMITATION THROUGH GESTURES AND AVOIDANCE OF INCIDENTS WHEREVER POSSIBLE DURING THE MONTHS AHEAD.

6. COMMENT: ISRAELIS REMAIN SKEPTICAL. THEY REMEMBER DE GUIRINGAUD'S PROMISE DURING HIS MARCH VISIT THAT FRANCE WOULD INITIATE ANTI-BOYCOTT LEGISLATION AND THEY REMEMBER THAT SUCH LEGISLATION WAS SUBSEQUENTLY KILLED BY EXECUTIVE ORDINANCE. FRENCH TALK OF JOINT TEMAS TO NEGOTIATE A NEW EXTRADITION TREATY CANNOT RECOMPENSE FOR ABU-DAOUD; A SPECIAL INVITATION FOR KATZIR TO CALL ON GISCARD CAN ONLY PARTIALLY ATONE FOR HIS BEING SNUBBED IN THE FIRST PLACE; EXPRESSIONS OF REGRET CANNOT COMPENSATE FOR LACK OF EARLY WARNING ON DECLARATIONS AND DEMARCHES AGAINST ISRAEL. NONETHELESS, IMPROVEMENT HAS TO BEGIN SOMEWHERE.

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THE LOCAL PRESS HAS QUOTED ISRAELI AMBASSADOR GAZIT WHO HAS DESCRIBED A THAW IN RELATIONS AND A MODEST SHIFT IN FRENCH POLICY. WHILE ISRAELIS ARE STILL NOT CERTAIN WHETHER FRENCH GESTURES ARE ONLY TACTICAL MANEUVERS LINKED TO THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN, THEY ARE INDICATING A RATHER REALISTIC AWARENESS OF FRENCH REALITY WHICH INCLUDES A HEAVY TRADE DEFICIT WITH THE ARABS DUE TO OIL DEPENDENCE, WHICH IT SEEKS TO OVERCOME THROUGH INCREASED SALES OF ARMS, CAPITAL EQUIPMENT AND TECHNICAL SERVICES.

7. ISRAELIS REMAIN CONCERNED OVER FRENCH EFFORTS
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TO PRE-EMPT THE ROLE AS EUROPEAN SPOKESMAN FOR A GENERALLY ANTI-ISRAELI AND PRO-ARAB "REALPOLITIK." ISRAEL, AWARE OF EUROPEAN VULNERABILITY, HAS TRIED TO PERSUADE EUROPE TO LIMIT ITS ROLE IN THE AREA PRINCIPALLY TO AN ECONOMIC ONE AND TO PERSUADE OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES NOT TO YIELD TO FRANCE THE ROLE OF PRINCIPAL SPOKESMAN ON BEHALF OF A PRESUMED COLLECTIVE EUROPEAN POLICY INTEREST TOWARD THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT. ISRAEL WILL THEREFORE SEEK TO COUNTER FRENCH AMBITIONS BY PLAYING ON BOTH FRANCO-U.S. DIFFERENCES AS WELL AS INTRA-EUROPEAN DIFFERENCES OVER THE POLICY AND ESPECIALLY ON GERMAN SENSITIVITIES REGARDING ISRAEL.

8. MANY ISRAELIS REGRET STILL TODAY THE FRENCH TURNABOUT FROM AN ALLY IN THE 40S AND 50S TO A NEAR ADVERSARY. AT THE SAME TIME, A STRONG SYMPATHY FOR FRANCE SURVIVES BASED ON ITS HISTORICAL ROLE IN BRINGING ABOUT RELIGIOUS EMANCIPATION AND ITS HAVING FOUGHT AND BLED IN THE BATTLE AGAINST THE NAZIS. MOREOVER, A LARGE SEGMENT OF THE ISRAELI POPULATION IS OF NORTH AFRICAN ORIGIN HENCE FRANCOPHONE--NOT AN INCONSIDERABLE POLITICAL FACTOR--OF WHICH FRANCE IS WELL AWARE, AS REFLECTED IN ITS CULTURAL ACTIVITIES HERE. THUS, THERE REMAINS A CONTINUING BASIS FOR THE HOPE THAT FRANCE-ISRAELI RELATIONS MAY SOMEDAY REVERT TO WHAT THEY WERE IN THE EARLY DAYS OF THE STATE. HOWEVER, ISRAELI LEADERS ARE SUFFICIENTLY

REALISTIC TO KNOW THAT THIS IS NOT FOR TOMORROW.

9. BEGIN HOPES AT BEST THAT AS PRIME MINISTER HE MAY
BE INVITED TO VISIT FRANCE AND THAT HE MIGHT BE ABLE
TO EXPLOIT THE FORTHCOMING FRENCH ELECTORAL STRUGGLE
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TO OBTAIN A SOMEWHAT MORE FAVORABLE GOVERNMENTAL
POSITION TOWARD HIS COUNTRY ON THE BASIS OF SUCH
FACTORS AS THE JEWISH VOTE IN MAJOR FRENCH URBAN AREAS,
EXTENSIVE ANTI-ARAB SENTIMENT, AND POSSIBLY EVEN
SOME LONG STANDING RIGHT-WING SYMPATHIES FOR ISRAEL SURVIVING
FROM THE NORTH AFRICAN STRUGGLE (SHADES
OF JACQUES SOUSTELLE). HOWEVER, THERE IS LITTLE ILLUSION
HERE THAT SUCH AN IMPROVEMENT IN RELATIONS COULD
BE ANYTHING BUT MINIMAL AND TEMPORARY. MOREOVER,
SINCE THE FALL OF THE LABOR PARTY FROM POWER THE FRENCH
LEFT HAS NOW BECOME EVEN LESS OF A POTENTIAL ALLY FOR
SUPPORTING ISRAEL THAN IT HAD BEEN HITHERTO. THUS,
WHATEVER THE OUTCOME OF THE 1978 FRENCH ELECTIONS,
THE PROSPECTS AS SEEN IN ISRAEL FOR A SUBSTANTIAL
CHANGE IN FRANCO-ISRAELI RELATIONS REMAIN LIMITED AS
LONG AS THE ME CONFLICT IS UNRESOLVED.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: FOREIGN RELATIONS, NEGOTIATIONS
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Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977TELAV07182
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770347-0250
Format: TEL
From: TEL AVIV
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
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Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 7
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 TEL AVIV 1469, 77 PARIS 8232, 77 TEL AVIV 2315
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 21-Mar-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1146917
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: FRENCH-ISRAELI RELATIONS
TAGS: PGOV, FR, IS
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/0cd9cc3e-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009